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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 007885

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2015

TAGS: MARR MASS PARM FR VE

SUBJECT: FRENCH CONFLICTED ON ARMS SALES TO VENEZUELA, BUT UNLIKELY TO SUPPORT PARITY ON BAN

REF: A. STATE 207628

1B. PARIS 7352

1C. PARIS 7142

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: Pol/MC and PolOff delivered reftel A points November 16 to MFA A/S-equivalent Daniel Parfait, DAS-equivalent for South America Michel Pinard, and Venezuela desk officer Lionel Paradisi, and PolOff separately shared points with Admiral de Monval, responsible for Latin American issues in the MOD's Strategic Affairs department. The MFA did not share our concerns about either the human rights situation in Venezuela or Chavez's destabilizing activities in the region. The MOD, while more open to our perspective, indicated that GoF policy on this issue is being driven from the President's office. Admiral de Monval indicated a French submarine sale to Venezuela is under discussion. Parfait requested assistance in setting up a meeting as soon as feasible to meet with A/S Shannon to discuss Venezuela and other WHA matters of mutual interest; such a meeting would be an opportunity to share perspectives and information and, if possible, narrow differences. End Summary.

Human Rights

12. (C) Parfait noted that prior to Chavez's recent visit to Paris, he had met with the president of the Venezuelan NGO Sumate as well as visiting Chief of Station in Caracas David Fitzgerald in order to increase French dialogue on both sides of the Venezuelan debate. The GoF has concluded for now that, while not perfect, the human rights situation is not as dire as the U.S. depicts it. Responding specifically to freedom of the press and the media, Parfait stated that there were daily calls for the assassination of Chavez in the Venezuelan press -- and other declarations of the kind that would be illegal in France. He also noted that there were no journalists imprisoned in Venezuela. Parfait claimed that during his conversation with the NGO Sumate, that organization's president was unable to name any political prisoners, nor provide a concrete example of "a deteriorating human rights situation." Parfait did acknowledge concern for potential abuse through property expropriation, but otherwise seemed unconcerned with the human rights situation in Venezuela, stating that France still had not seen any "smoking gun."

Regional Instability

13. (C) Parfait equally downplayed the role Chavez might play in destabilizing the region. He said that given Venezuela's long and difficult-to-patrol border with Colombia, FARC members are able to find refuge in Venezuela, as they do in Brazil and Ecuador, allowing that the refuge might be "voluntary." Parfait also admitted the possibility that Chavez was providing money to Evo Morales in Bolivia, although he had not seen evidence that the amount being provided would be enough to tip the scales in an election. He added that France was committed to seeing the upcoming Bolivian elections held with as much transparency as possible.

Threat of Arms

14. (S) Parfait hypothesized that Chavez's efforts in securing arms and weapons were to satisfy his generals, thereby insulating himself against additional coup attempts. Parfait acknowledged the visit of the defense-related delegation to Venezuela, but did not elaborate further. The MFA has previously indicated that the possibility of defense-related sales have been generally discussed in the past, but that no specifics have been under negotiation and that the issue was still being explored by the GoF (ref B).

MOD Opposes Arms Sales

15. (S) In a conversation with PolOff, MOD Admiral de Monval, responsible for Latin American issues in the Strategic Affairs department, welcomed being apprised of our new approach not to transfer or sell lethal arms and munitions to Venezuela. He noted that the MOD shared the U.S. position on arms sales to that country. De Monval (protect) also confided that the MOD had not been consulted on a proposed

sale of submarines (NFI) to Venezuela, which the Ministry opposes. The MOD is seeking to influence the final Presidential decision on this issue, but so far without success.

Comment

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16. (S) There is clearly a debate within the GoF on the sale of military technology and arms to Venezuela. The MOD seems more wary of Chavez and his intentions. However, the policy appears to be driven by President Chirac, who is much more open to increased cooperation with Venezuela, as evidenced by the exceedingly warm welcome extended to Chavez during his October visit (ref B). For its part, the MFA's long-held complacency with regard to Venezuela remains unaltered. Post judges it is unlikely that the French will refrain from military sales to Venezuela, and may well go ahead with proposed sales of submarines. End Comment.

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Stapleton